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Icelandic volcano eruption

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Our forecasters are helping to keep aeroplanes safe by monitoring the ash plume from an erupting volcano in Iceland. Eyjafjöll on the south of the island began to erupt for the first time in nearly two centuries, early on Sunday, firing lava and volcanic ash into the sky. A second, larger eruption began early on Monday, throwing out further debris and gases.

Volcanic ash can be dangerous for aircraft, causing damage, reducing visibility, and potentially clogging engines. The Met Office is part of a global network of Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres (VAAC) set up to provide guidance to pilots and airlines to help them avoid these dangers.

Through our Environment Monitoring and Response Centre (EMARC) we're responsible for the Iceland area. Working closely with the Icelandic Met. Service, we've been monitoring the plume from the eruption since it began. Using observations from Iceland, satellite imagery and our specialist model which predicts how pollutants move through the atmosphere, we've sent out advisories to keep the aviation industry and pilots aware of the situation.

As a result of the eruption some transatlantic flights have been rerouted, and Iceland's two airports were temporarily closed to ensure safety.

Anton Muscat, from EMARC, said: "We're prepared for this because we regularly exercise with the Iceland Met Office for this type of event. As a result, EMARC were able to respond immediately during the early hours of Sunday morning and provide the necessary Volcanic Ash advisories and associated graphics. This was not too large an eruption, with the plume rising to around 18,000 ft. The amount of upper cloud across the North Atlantic at the moment means it is difficult to follow any plume on satellite imagery. However, we're continuing to work with the Iceland Met Office to provide guidance on how the plume is likely to move."

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